

80C401.2 Three

Days of the  
Condor

## Spy Games

One of the most important duties of the movies is to turn our mounting paranoia into fun and games. Anxiety becomes entertainment as our uncertainty is replaced by a slick scenario and our bumbling life-style is transformed into the adroit cavorting of superstars. It's confusing to read all those scary stories about the Byzantine machinations of the CIA, but the whole mess whips itself into shape as we watch Robert Redford and Faye Dunaway take the burden from our hearts and minds in **THREE DAYS OF THE CONDOR**.

Redford is an apotheosis of cuteness as he comes to work on his motorcycle

through the New York traffic, all tweedy and windblown and enthusiastic about his job. No Howard Hunt involved in surrealistic plots, Redford is a super-bookworm, devouring novels and magazines as part of a CIA front that computerizes popular literature in its endless search for patterns of intrigue. Dunaway is your average dynamite chick whose deep but inarticulate feelings about life come through in the photographs she takes, especially those with eloquently empty spaces.

**Massacre:** When Redford stumbles upon a plot, set by "a CIA within the CIA," to move in on the oil-producing countries, his cell of gentle readers and researchers is wiped out in a gruesomely efficient massacre that misses him because he's out buying lunch for everyone. Redford then assumes his code identity, Condor, and is off on a desperate double chase in which he is pursued by both the straight CIA and the crooked one. He latches on to Dunaway, and the two become your classic Fugitive Fun Couple, on the make as they are on the lam.

This is exactly the kind of thing that Graham Greene is doing in those stories (and films) that he calls "entertainments," in which he is entertaining his audience and, in another sense of the word, entertaining ideas and issues of size and significance. But director Sydney Pollack and his writers, Lorenzo Semple Jr. and David Rayfiel, are not in this league. They have been more ambitious than James Grady in his novel, "Six Days of the Condor," who was satisfied with a CIA plot involving dope in Southeast Asia. Pollack wants to raise the bigger specter of war and apocalypse. But both the novel and film falsify the issue by postulating a black CIA within a white CIA, when the real issue is the actual, or dangerously gray, CIA.

**Explosion:** As a straight thriller "Condor" comes down to thrills that work and thrills that don't. The violence is potato-chip crisp, especially the initial massacre, a velvety explosion of muffled machine guns. But in the big semi-nude love action between Redford and Dunaway, Pollack has Antonionitis as he pretentiously intercuts the scene with examples of Dunaway's oh-so-existential photographs.

The characters who come close to working perfectly are the sinister international gunman, played with dapper deadliness by Max von Sydow, and the enigmatic Mr. Wabash of the CIA, played by John Houseman. In the character of Wabash, Houseman personifies the ambiguity of the CIA that the film itself dilutes to good guys and bad guys. Mr. Wabash is a deliciously chilling mixture of both. His intimidating civility, his laser-beam brain, his total cynicism, all add up to a frightening incarnation of Intelligence as indeed a super-intelligence, something that knows much more than we do and can do just about anything with what it knows.

-J.K.